

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-05 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 FRB-03
INR-07 NSAE-00 USIA-06 TRSE-00 XMB-02 OPIC-03
SP-02 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 L-03 H-01 NSC-05
SS-15 STR-04 CEA-01 PA-01 PRS-01 IGA-02 AGRE-00
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FM AMEMBASSY DACCA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4417

C O N F I D E N T I A L DACCA 2237

PASS ALSO TO AID/ASIA

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: EAID, EAGR, BG
SUBJECT: BANGLADESH FOOD SITUATION

1. USAID DIRECTOR TONER CALLED ON AIR VICE MARSHAL MAHMOOD
APRIL 26 TO REVIEW CURRENT FOOD SITUATION. DURING MEETING MAHMOOD
MADE FOLLOWING POINTS:

A. MAHMOOD REGRETTED HE WAS UNABLE TO TAKE THE U.S. INTO
HIS CONFIDENCE EARLIER, BUT ONE OF THE DRIVING FORCES IN HIS REQUEST
FOR INCREASED FOOD ASSISTANCE WAS THE TIME FRAME THE BDG DEVELOPED
FOR "CIVILIANIZING" THE GOVERNMENT. WITHOUT AN ASSURANCE OF AMPLE
FOOD STOCKS AND THUS SOME HOPE FOR CURBING INFLATION, THE DECISION
TO MOVE FROM A MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATION TO A DOMECRATIC SOCIETY
WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN TAKEN. MAHMOOD SAID HE IS GRATEFUL FOR THE
KEY ROLE THE U.S. PLAYED IN MAKING IT POSSIBLE FOR THE BDG
TO BEGIN THIS PROCESS.

B. WHILE THE U.S. ALLOCATIONS OF PL 480 AND BDG COMMERCIAL
PURCHASES OF FOODGRAIN WILL STARVE OFF ANY POSSIBILITY OF STARVATION,
MAHMOOD IS STILL UNCOMFORTABLE WHETHER THE RICE SHORTAGE MAY
STILL GENERATE INFLATIONARY PRESSURES. HE LOOKS FORWARD TO
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CONTINUED REVIEWS OF THIS SUBJECT WITH THE USG DURING THE
NEXT THREE MONTHS TO SEE IF A CASE IS PRESENT TO WARRANT FURTHER
RICE INPUTS. HE SAID HE APPRECIATES THE FACT THAT RICE IS EXPENSIVE,
AND THAT FURTHER REQUEST WOULD HAVE BUDGET IMPLICATIONS FOR THE
U.S. HOWEVER, IF THIS IS THE COST OF MOVING BANGLADESH BACK
INTO THE RANKS OF DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES, HE HOPES WE WILL BE
FORTHCOMING.

C. WITH RESPECT TO THE PENDING AMENDMENT TO THE TITLE I AGREEMENT, MAHMOOD SAID HE WOULD HOPE THERE COULD BE AN INFORMAL EXCHANGE OF ANY NEW U.S. SELF-HELP PROPOSALS BEFORE THIRD COUNTRY CLEARANCES ARE COMPLETED SO THAT ONCE THE CLEARANCES ARE IN HAND THE US-BDG NEGOTIATIONS COULD BE SHORTENED.

D. MAHMOOD BRIEFLY DISCUSSED THE RESULTS OF AN INTER-MINISTERIAL MEETING ON THE BANGLADESH EDIBLE OIL SITUATION, AND ASKED THAT U.S. OFFICIALS MEET WITH THE FOOD SECRETARY FOR ADDITIONAL DATA.

E. IN CLOSING THE MEETING, MAHMOOD SAID HE FOUND USAID CHARTS ON RICE PRICE FLUCTUATIONS OF CONSIDERABLE UTILITY AND WOULD TRY TO HAVE HIS STAFF MAINTAIN SIMILAR STATISTICS FOR HIM. HE SAID HE WAS TRYING TO INSTITUTIONALIZE NEW PROCEDURES AND REORGANIZE THE FOOD MINISTRY SO THAT HIS SUCCESSOR WOULD BE IN BETTER CONDITION TO EFFECTIVELY MANAGE BDG FOOD REQUIREMENTS.

2. COMMENT. IN RESPONDING TO THE AIR VICE MARSHAL, TONER NOTED THAT THE BDG FOOD PICTURE NOW LOOKED COMFORTABLE AND THAT IN TERMS OF INFLATIONARY PRESSURES THE DANGERS LOOKED MORE REAL IN THE AREA OF EDIBLE OIL THAN IN OTHER COMMODITIES. THIS IS THE SECOND TIME DURING TH PAST WEEK THAT MAHMOOD HAS SPOKEN ABOUT HIS FUTURE AND HINTED THAT HE MIGHT BE LEAVING HIS CIVILIAN POST BEFORE LONG.
MASTERS

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